



Ringo Project

CRESCENT RANGER DISTRICT, DESCHUTES NATIONAL FOREST

MAY 2015

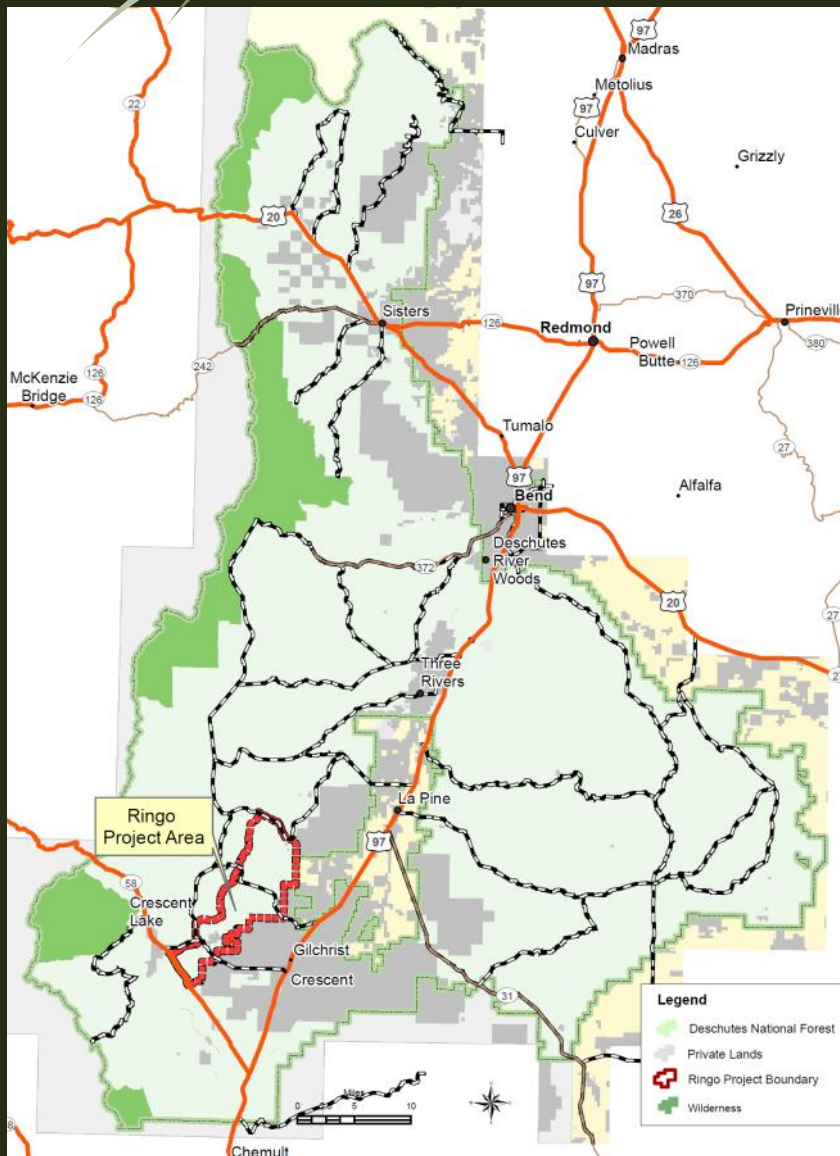
Project Initiation

The Crescent Ranger District is initiating the Ringo Project, encompassing approximately 30,000 acres of U.S. Forest Service land in Klamath and Deschutes counties. This project is named after Ringo Butte, located near the center of the project area. The area is dominated by volcanic buttes with mixed conifer vegetation on middle and upper slopes, ponderosa pine on the lower slopes, and lodgepole pine in the flats and saddles.

The Ringo project area is home to a myriad of wildlife and plant species including big game species, the northern spotted owl, the Oregon spotted frog, and other wildlife. The project area borders private forest land on the east as well as encompassing the community of Wickiup Acres. It also contains popular locations for hunting, fishing, and other types of recreation.

The Forest Service would like to continue to provide a diverse array of benefits on this landscape and is proposing activities that will create a more resilient ecosystem, protecting its many values into the future.

This letter provides you with the **who, what, where and why** of the Ringo Project. It also discusses how you can stay involved in the planning process.



Developing Objectives

In order to develop objectives for the Ringo Project area, the Crescent Ranger District formed an **Inter-disciplinary Team (IDT)** consisting of specialists in forestry, wildfire fuels, wildlife, hydrology, soil science, botany, fisheries, and cultural resources. The IDT reviewed the suite of values provided by the project area and discussed potential threats to those values and tradeoffs in management actions. The Crescent Ranger District also reached out to the community and local partners to discuss the values and benefits they feel are important in the project area. The desire to reduce potential threats and maintain the balance of different values into the future led to the “need” for the Ringo Project.

Values



Threat to Values



Need for Project

Values and Services

Values and ecosystem services within the Ringo Project area were derived from values mapping exercises with the Ringo IDT and from a public meeting. Prominent values expressed include:

- High quality wildlife habitat for sensitive and threatened species
- Nearby private land and communities
- Timber, firewood, forest products
- Access to the forest for hiking, wildlife viewing, driving, and winter recreation
- Developed and dispersed camping
- Hunting opportunities
- Odell Butte Lookout



March 9th, 2015 Public Meeting

Threat to Values and Services

The Ringo IDT determined the largest potential for changes or threats to these values comes from wildfire, insects and disease. As evidenced by the Davis fire, which covers a portion of the planning area, wildfire can rapidly and dramatically alter large areas and affect safety and property. Disturbances such as wildfire and insect and disease outbreaks are natural processes, however, with the current fuel loading and high density of trees in the Ringo Project area these disturbances can become uncharacteristically severe.



2003 Davis Fire

Need for Project

In order to continue to provide these values and services on the landscape into the future, there is a need to reduce tree density and surface fuels in order to restore and maintain a resilient, fire-adapted ecosystem that will:

- ◇ Protect or enhance quality habitat for key wildlife species including the northern spotted owl, white-headed woodpecker, and big game
- ◇ Allow for safe and effective wildfire response
- ◇ Maintain developed and dispersed recreational opportunities
- ◇ Contribute to local and regional economies by providing timber, firewood, and other forest products



C. Rosterolla 2005

Northern spotted owl

Additional Guidance

The objectives developed for the Ringo Project are consistent with recommendations and direction presented in the Multiple Use Sustained Yield Act of 1960, the National Cohesive Wildland Fire Management Strategy, the Deschutes Land and Resource Management Plan as amended, and other national and regional guidance. The Ringo Project area contains land covered under the Northwest Forest Plan and the Eastside Screens (see boundary line on the map of the proposed action). The Ringo Project will be analyzed in an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) consistent with the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (NEPA).



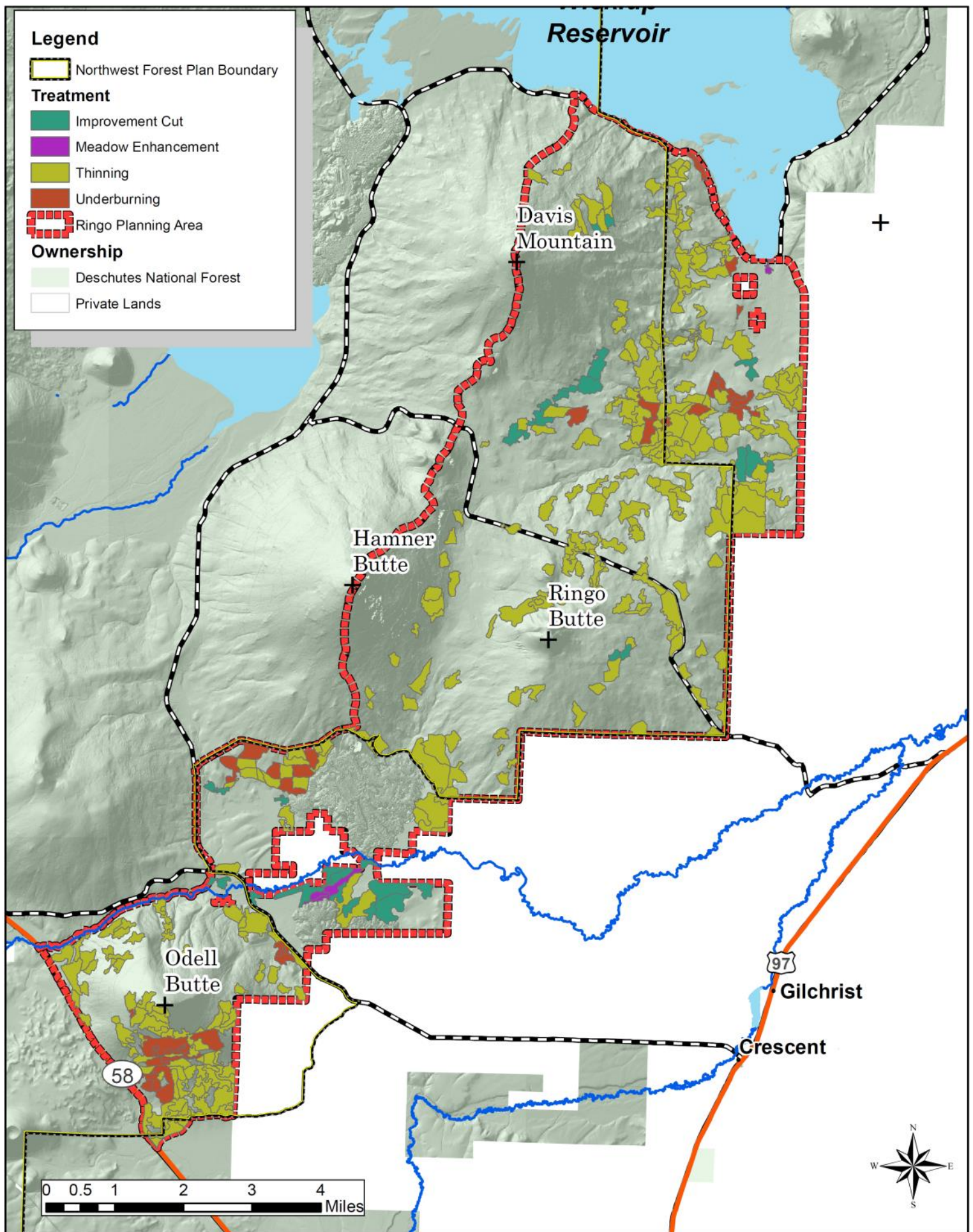
Proposed Action

Thinning - 6,796 Acres – Primarily thinning from below which removes the smallest trees first until the desired density is achieved. Various techniques would be used to maintain or increase variability in tree spacing. Thinning increases individual tree growth and reduces fire and insect risk by reducing ladder fuels and overall stand density. Reduced stand density will protect wildlife habitat and make stands more resilient. It will also increase historically open habitat for species like the white-headed woodpecker and black-backed woodpecker across the landscape. Less fire resilient tree species such as lodgepole pine and white fir would be preferentially removed. Approximately 4,435 acres are expected to produce a merchantable timber product and the remaining 2,361 acres, which have smaller or fewer trees, may be utilized as chip wood or biomass if market conditions are favorable. Treatments are designed to keep tree densities at desired levels for 20 or 30 years.

Improvement Cut – 784 acres - In lodgepole pine (560 acres) this treatment removes damaged, diseased, or otherwise unhealthy trees. The majority of these stands have previously suffered high mortality from bark beetle attack. In mixed conifer areas (224 acres) this treatment would primarily involve removing white fir and other damaged and diseased trees along the edges of the Davis fire. These stands experienced moderate mortality in the fire which produced high ground fuel loads and downed wood. Existing ground fuels and downed wood would also be reduced in these stands to allow for safe and effective fire response.

Meadow Enhancement – 64 Acres - This treatment would occur in wetter lodgepole pine areas that previously were more open. The majority of trees would be removed from these areas. Meadows and grasslands are a rare habitat on the Deschutes National Forest. This treatment would enhance understory vegetation which is important for big game and other animal species.

Road status changes - Roads that are currently classified as open but are physically blocked or mismapped would be closed and alternate ingress egress routes currently listed as closed would be opened. This will reduce confusion in the event of wildfire evacuations and further aid the safety and effectiveness of wildfire response.



Proposed Action Map

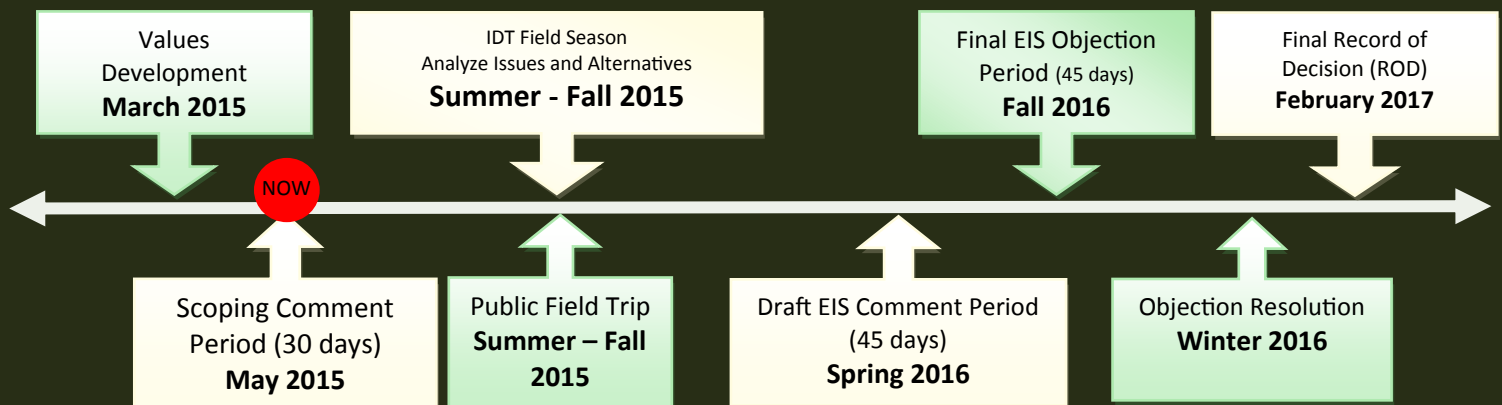
Proposed Action Continued

Slash Treatments – Slash created by the proposed mechanical activities would be treated by a variety of methods in order to create desired fuels conditions. Methods include hand and grapple piling followed by pile burning, utilization, or chipping/grinding.

Underburning – 4,780 Acres – Underburning would occur in the majority of ponderosa pine dominated stands after mechanical treatment. Additional areas that were previously treated in other projects or whose current conditions facilitate safe and effective operations are also included.

The combination of these activities provide for a more resilient and fire-adapted ecosystem. By reducing the overall landscape wildfire risk, areas of dense forest that provide important wildlife habitat such as northern spotted owl nesting, roosting, and foraging (NRF) and big game hiding cover will be protected without receiving thinning treatments. Wildlife habitat will also be enhanced by reducing nest predation in white-headed woodpecker habitat with open ponderosa pine, increasing individual tree growth in areas that can provide future NRF, and providing better big game forage in meadow enhancements. Safe and effective wildfire response will be aided by reducing fire intensities and the flexibility of using recently treated areas for suppression as well as clearer routes for public evacuation by road. Unique features such as wildlife, trees, and iconic buttes that draw people to the area will be protected by reducing the risk of large fires. Recreational opportunities will be maintained into the future. Finally, wood products removed in these treatments will provide timber, firewood and other forest products to the local and regional economies.

Ringo Analysis Timeline



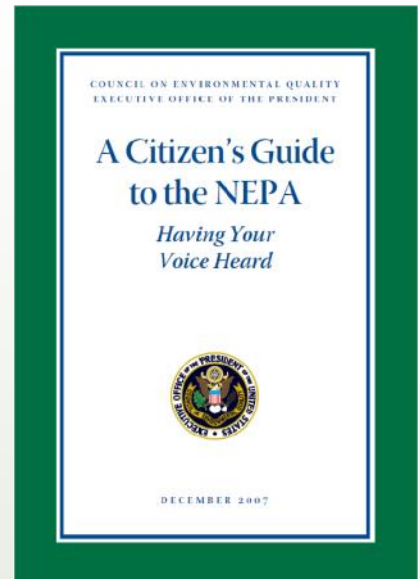
Crescent Creek

How to Provide Feedback and Stay Involved

Your comments and feedback will help provide valuable information to the Ringo IDT and can help identify additional issues and opportunities not previously identified. The Forest Service is interested in how the proposed actions detailed in this letter would either enhance or diminish the benefits you get from the Ringo Project area. This letter marks the beginning of the scoping comment period. Your feedback would be most helpful if received by June 30, 2015. The Notice of Intent is predicted to be published in the National Register by the end of May.

More information and PDF versions of maps are available on the project website at: http://www.fs.fed.us/nepa/nepa_project_exp.php?project=46900

A valuable reference for anyone wishing to get involved in the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) process is *A Citizens Guide to NEPA, Having Your Voice Heard*, published by the Council on Environmental Quality. A copy of the guide can be found at: https://ceq.doe.gov/nepa/Citizens_Guide_Dec07.pdf



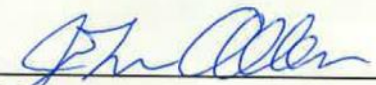
Please direct your comments on Ringo to **Holly Jewkes, District Ranger, Crescent Ranger District, PO Box 208, Crescent, OR 97733**. Comments can also be emailed to: comments-pacificnorthwest-deschutes-crescent@fs.fed.us

Your scoping comments will become part of the public project record. For more information on the Ringo Project or the NEPA process, contact Ringo IDT Leads Michelle King, District Environmental Coordinator at (541) 433-3216 or mdking02@fs.fed.us, or Joe Bowles, District Silviculturist at (541) 433-3200 or jbowles@fs.fed.us.

You will have an additional opportunity to comment when the Draft EIS is made available. Per 36 CFR 218(a)(2), this project is not authorized under HFRA and is thus subject to subparts A and C of the 218 Objection Regulations. The 36 CFR 218 Objection Regulations are part of the Project-level Predecisional Administrative Review Process and allow the public to provide additional input before a decision is made.

Thank you for your interest in the Deschutes National Forest and Ringo Project. We look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,



JOHN ALLEN
Forest Supervisor, Deschutes National Forest



C. Rosterolla 2013